

Salt Lake Tabernacle
(Mormon Tabernacle)
Latter Day Saints Temple Square, South Temple
Salt Lake City
Salt Lake County
Utah

HABS No. 36-U-2

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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MORMON TABERNACLE
Salt Lake City, Utah

Owner: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon Church)

Date of Erection: 1865-1867

Architect: William H. Folsom

Builder: Mormon Church. Henry Grow, a former Pennsylvania bridge builder, credited with structural ideas employed.

Present Condition: Excellent preservation. Original structure did not contain present gallery, which was added in 1870. Original wood shingles on roof replaced in 1910 by sheet metal.

Number of Stories: One.

Materials of Construction: Foundations and wall piers supporting roof trusses - local sandstone. Exterior trim and cornice-wood. Roof trusses - local pine.

Other Existing Records: For detailed description and history see "The Mormon Tabernacle and its World Famed Organ and Choir", by Levi E. Young, 1930.

Additional Data: Architecturally, this unique American auditorium is a monument of rugged and forthright design remarkable in an era of eclecticism and foible. Built when Utah was still a pioneering community, it is world-famed in modern times for its excellent acoustical qualities. It is approximately 150 feet wide, the straight side walls terminating in semi-circular end walls. The length of the structure is approximately 250 feet. The heavy stone piers which project from the exterior wall at intervals of about fourteen feet, acting as supports for roof trusses, give an effect in plan reminiscent of buttresses projecting from a curtain wall, as in early Gothic cathedrals.

The idea of the vaulted ceiling and roof appears to have been developed by Henry Grow out of his bridge-building experience with the Remington type truss. This curved truss is constructed of pine timbers, each $2\frac{1}{2}$ by $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches, secured at joints with 2 inch

round wood pegs and lashed with rawhide thongs at intermediate points. Two pairs of these timbers run parallel to form each chord. The pegs at each truss joint therefore run through six timbers, a total thickness of approximately fifteen inches. This feature of construction has given rise to a popular idea that the Tabernacle was built "without a single nail", which is far from the truth. Nails were made and used for the shingle; flooring, stairs, etc.

The large double-hung windows which pierce the wall between piers are worthy of special note. At the curved ends the sash and muntins follow the curvature of the wall. This complication, added to the fact that the movable sash is over eleven feet wide, appears not to hinder operation.

It will be noted that the wood caps of the piers, as well as mouldings in the wood cornice, are executed in the fashion of the Greek Revival. Before 1850 this architectural vogue was in high favor in New York State and Ohio, the scenes of first Mormon settlements.

Author

John P. Orin

Approved

Date

Dec. 1937

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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page 3

SALT LAKE TABERNACLE
(MORMON TABERNACLE)

Location: Latter Day Saints Temple Square, South Temple,
Salt Lake City, Salt Lake County, Utah
Latitude: 40° 46' 23" N Longitude: 111° 53' 31" W

Present Owner: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Present Occupant: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Present Use: Tabernacle for church, civic functions

Statement of
Significance: Although over 100 years old, it is still (1968) the
largest indoor auditorium in Utah, the major gathering
space for conferences of the LDS (Mormon) Church on
Temple Square.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Originally built and still owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
2. Date of erection: Completed October, 1867
Dedicated October 9, 1875
3. Architect: Henry Grow, under Church architect, William H. Folsom
4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Henry Grow, builder, Joseph Harris Ridges, organ designer & builder, Joseph A. Young (son of Brigham) supplied lumber. Assistants to Ridges on organ construction: Shure Olsen, Niels Johnson, Henry Taylor, Frank Wood (& others).
5. Alterations and additions: Balcony added in 1870. Organ remodeled 1885 by Niels Johnson. Organ enlarged 1900 by W. W. Kimball Co., Chicago. Organ overhauled, 15 foot wings added, 1915 by Austin Organ Co. of Hartford, Conn. Electric lighting, steam heat added. Copper roof applied about 1900 over wood shingle roof. Aluminum roof installed 1907 by Jed L. Ashton (Overly Mfg. Co.) Many changes to podium and platforms.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

This famed building, the home of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, was a marvel of its time. It replaced the old tabernacle which was also located on the Temple grounds in Salt Lake City, in the southwest corner. Construction began in 1863 and continued until its dedication in 1875. The building, whose tortoise shape was reportedly suggested by Brigham Young, is 250 feet long, 150 feet wide, and 80 feet high. The roof rests on red sandstone piers, 10 to 12 feet apart. Although the proposed specifications for the building were announced by Church Architect, William H. Folsom, and the roof structure was designed by Henry Grow, the actual credit for the building design is still disputed.

The Tabernacle was originally intended for religious purposes exclusively, but as the need for a large auditorium for secular functions became apparent, the structure began to serve both activities. The first major personality to appear in the Tabernacle was Adelina Patti, on April 1, 1884. She was followed by such performers as Nellie Melba, Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Lili Pons, Ignace Jan Paderewski, Lauritz Melchior, Lawrence Tibbett, John Charles Thomas, Nino Martini, Richard Crooks, John Philip Sousa, Fritz Kreisler, Vladimir Horowitz, Rise Stevens, Igor Gorin, Arthur Rubenstein, Yehudi Menuhin, Marian Anderson, and many others, including noted lecturers and world personalities such as Shirley Temple and Helen Keller. All Presidents since 1900, with the exception of Calvin Coolidge, have spoken here, as have most of the major presidential candidates.

C. Sources of Information:

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ADDENDUM TO:
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